

## Strengthening MSME Competitiveness Through Empowerment: Evidence from Padang City Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

MSMEs play a role in driving economic growth, but in Padang City, they have not developed due to limited capital, lack of innovation, weak bookkeeping, unprofessional management, and low financial/digital literacy. This study aims to describe the strategies Padang City Cooperatives and MSMEs Service in empowerment of MSMEs in Padang City. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, with data collection techniques through interviews, observation, and documentation. Twenty MSMEs were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data to determine their experiences in receiving empowerment guidance from the Padang City government. The research results found six main themes of MSME empowerment carried out by the Padang City government, namely increasing human resource capacity, developing MSME institutions, facilitating access to financing, carrying out product innovation, expanding market networks, and creating ecosystem collaboration. This study contributes by placing MSMEs at the center of research and providing context-specific information on policy and practice. It also provides practical recommendations for program sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Competitiveness; Empowerment; MSMEs; Padang City*

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### INTRODUCTION

Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) have a strategic role in driving economic growth, job creation, and reducing poverty levels in developing countries like Indonesia (Abisuga-Oyekunle et al., 2020; Owoeye, 2025; Surya et al., 2021). The MSME sector in Indonesia has proven to be the backbone of the national economy, especially in facing various economic crises (Naradda Gamage et al., 2020). The contribution of MSMEs is not only evident in the dominant number of business units, but also in their ability to absorb labor and increase community income. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and SMEs (2024) shows that 60 million MSMEs contribute 60.34% to GDP and absorb approximately 97% of the national workforce (Kementerian Koperasi dan UKM, 2024).

In Padang City, West Sumatra, MSMEs are the main pillar of the regional economy with rapid growth in the culinary, trade, services, crafts and creative industry sectors based on local culture (Afifah et al., 2024; Games & Mardiah, 2021). MSMEs play an important role in job creation, income equality, and economic growth in Padang City (Games & Mardiah, 2021). However, this great potential has not been fully developed because the perpetratorsMSMEs face various challenges that can hinder the growth of their businesses.Common problems faced by MSMEs that often arise include limited access to financing, low managerial capacity, licensing and lack of product innovation, as well as minimal use of digital technology in business operations and marketing (Maheshkar & Soni, 2021). Furthermore, the challenges of increasingly competitive markets require MSMEs to adapt quickly and sustainably.

Given the various challenges faced by MSMEs in Padang City, a targeted and sustainable empowerment strategy is needed to increase competitiveness and ensure business continuity. MSME empowerment is not limited to providing capital assistance but also includes strengthening human resource capacity through training and mentoring, increasing access to market information, developing product quality and innovation, and integrating with the digital ecosystem (Aminullah et al., 2024; Carvalho et al., 2024; Karunia et al., 2024). A comprehensive empowerment approach based on the real needs of MSMEs is believed to have a more optimal impact than a partial and sectoral approach. Synergy between local governments, financial institutions, academics, and the private sector is key to creating a conducive ecosystem for MSME growth (Abate & Sheferaw, 2023; Dhar et al., 2024; Osano, 2021). With integrated collaboration, MSMEs can not only increase internal capacity but also expand market access and business networks.

Based on the description above, a study on the empowerment strategy for MSMEs in Padang City is important because MSMEs in Padang Cityrequires an effective strategy to encourage its growth so that it can contribute more optimally to regional development.This study aims to provide an empirical overview of MSME empowerment strategies in Padang City. By exploring MSME empowerment strategies in Padang City, this research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of the literature on MSME empowerment, as well as practical insights into policy evaluation for local governments and relevant stakeholders in formulating more targeted and sustainable strategies.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design based on the interpretive post-positivism paradigm which focuses on the development strategy of MSMEs in Padang City through data obtained directly from business actors (Creswell, 2014; Takona, 2024). This research was conducted in Padang City with MSME actors as subjects who were selected purposively according to the research objectives and representatives of the Cooperatives and MSMEs Service of Padang City (Gill, 2020). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews supported by secondary data from scientific articles and related policy publications. Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis to identify patterns of MSME development strategies based on the perspectives of business

actors and stakeholders. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, and by observing research ethics by obtaining participant consent and maintaining the confidentiality of their identities in the research report (Lim, 2025).

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### RESEARCH RESULT

#### 1. Profile of MSME Respondents in Padang City

The sample in this study involved twenty MSMEs located in Padang City with a business background operating in the culinary sector. The scale of the businesses they run falls into the micro-enterprise category. In terms of business age, most businesses are within the range of 1-2 years. They are sole proprietorships and do not yet have a business license. Respondents' business sector, scale, age, form of business entity, and business license reflect the homogeneity of MSMEs in the study area. Explanation of these characteristics is important to provide empirical context for the capabilities, needs, and strategies in MSME development, as well as to serve as a foundation for planning MSME empowerment strategies.

The uniformity of respondent characteristics provides a comprehensive picture of the dynamics of needs in MSME empowerment strategies, particularly in understanding the patterns of challenges, opportunities, and the most relevant forms of support for business actors. This condition indicates that most respondents face relatively similar problems, such as limited access to financing, low managerial capacity, suboptimal utilization of digital technology, and the need for sustainable business training and mentoring. With relatively homogeneous characteristics, the research results are more focused in identifying empowerment policy priorities, so that the designed strategy can be focused on strengthening business capacity, increasing financial and digital literacy, expanding market access, and developing partnership networks that can more effectively increase MSME competitiveness and sustainability. The overall characteristics of respondents in this study can be seen in the following table.

Table 1. Profile of MSME Respondents

No .	Participants	Business Sector	Business Scale	Business Age	Form of Business Entity	Business permit
1.	P1	Culinary	Micro	1.5 Years	Individual	There isn't any
2.	P1	Culinary	Micro	1 year	Individual	There isn't any

<b>3.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>4.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>5.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	1 year	Individual	There isn't any
<b>6.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	1 year	Individual	There isn't any
<b>7.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>8.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>9.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	1.5 Years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>10.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>11.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>12.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>13.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	1.5 Years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>14.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
<b>15.</b>	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any

16.	P1	Culinary	Micro	1.5 Years	Individual	There isn't any
17.	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
18.	P1	Culinary	Micro	1 year	Individual	There isn't any
19.	P1	Culinary	Micro	2 years	Individual	There isn't any
20.	P1	Culinary	Micro	1.5 Years	Individual	There isn't any

## 2. Padang City Government's Strategy in Empowering MSMEs

Thematic analysis was conducted on the results of interviews with MSME actors and representative of the Cooperatives and SMEs Service five main themes were identified, namely: (1) Strategy to increase the human resource capacity of MSME actors, (2) Strategy for developing MSME institutions, (3) institutional and regulatory barriers, (4) formal financing alternatives, and (5) opportunities emerging from government and digital interventions. Each theme is discussed with sub-themes, participant quotes, and links to literature.

### Theme 1: Strategy Improving Human Resources Capacity

One of the challenges faced by MSMEs in Padang City is the low human resource capacity of MSMEs, which causes low productivity and efficiency, weak management governance, slow adoption of technology and innovation, difficulty accessing capital, limited marketing and low product quality, and low motivation. To increase the capacity of MSME business actors in Padang City Department of Cooperatives and SMEs conducted training to improve the human resource capacity of MSMEs in Padang City. An MSME owner explained, "The city government, through the Cooperatives and MSMEs Office, provides much-needed human resource capacity training for us MSMEs." Improving the human resources (HR) capacity of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) plays a crucial role, not only in maintaining business sustainability but also in driving broader economic growth. Strengthening HR capacity through various efforts such as training, mentoring, and assistance can optimize the potential of MSMEs while preparing them for greater responsibilities in the future (Indrayani et al., 2025; Paramata et al., 2025; Ridwantoro & Rinaldi, 2025).

Providing business management training is one of the strategic interventions carried out by the Padang City government to increase the capacity of MSME business

actors so that they are able to manage business operations more systematically, effectively and sustainably (Sofa et al., 2025). This training program not only serves as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as an empowerment effort that encourages a change in the mindset of business actors from simply running a business conventionally to a more professional and structured approach (Kartini et al., 2025). Through this training, business owners are equipped with a comprehensive understanding of mature business planning, accountable financial management, efficient cost control, and data-driven decision-making strategies and market analysis. This business management training is also aimed at improving MSMEs' adaptability to the dynamics of an increasingly competitive and digitalized business environment (Setiawan et al., 2025). Businesses are encouraged to utilize technology for financial recording, marketing, and inventory management, thereby increasing productivity and competitiveness. With this increased capacity, it is hoped that MSMEs will not only be able to survive various economic challenges but also develop sustainably and make a more significant contribution to local economic growth in Padang City.

#### Theme 2: Strategy for Developing MSME Institutions

Most MSMEs in Padang City still operate as sole proprietorships and lack adequate business legality. This reflects a low level of business formality, which ultimately limits access to various strategic resources, particularly financing from formal financial institutions. Yet, business legality plays a crucial role in enhancing business credibility, providing legal protection, and expanding opportunities for access to government programs and business partnerships (Li et al., 2020). With legal documents, MSMEs are not only officially recognized by the state but also have a stronger bargaining position in establishing partnerships with external parties. This is reinforced by the statement of one MSME owner who stated that "the government assists in the process of managing MSME legality," indicating real government support in encouraging business formalization.

Facilitating business legality is a strategic step that serves not only as an administrative tool but also as an effort to strengthen the institutional foundation of MSMEs so they can operate more professionally and competitively. Assistance in obtaining a Business Identification Number (NIB) is a key instrument that serves as a legal gateway, providing legal certainty and ease of access to various government services, such as financing, training, and business development programs (Li et al., 2020; Prayitno, 2024). Furthermore, the existence of the NIB also opens up opportunities for MSMEs to integrate into the formal economic ecosystem, including within the broader industrial supply chain (Ramadhan & Nafi'ah, 2025). Therefore, synergy between the government, supporting institutions, and business actors is essential to ensure that the legalization process is not only easily accessible but also has a tangible impact on improving the performance and sustainability of MSMEs in Padang City.

### Theme 3: Strategies to Facilitate Access to Financing for MSMEs

One of the challenges faced by MSMEs in Padang City is the difficulty for MSMEs to access financing (Lin et al., 2022). MSMEs explained that they have limited access to capital from banks. One MSME owner explained: "When I went to the bank, they asked me to provide documents such as a house certificate. We don't have such assets, so the process stopped there." This finding aligns with research that MSMEs in low- and middle-income countries lack the fixed collateral required by banks and experience systemic exclusion (Beck, 2013). The same trend is also seen in India, where financial institutions prefer established companies with physical assets over MSMEs (Rajamani et al., 2022).

Providing easy access to formal financing sources is a key factor in encouraging business growth and sustainability, especially for MSMEs which often face capital constraints (Dela Cruz et al., 2025). Access to bank credit allows businesses to obtain funding through more structured schemes, competitive interest rates, and clear regulatory protection. However, various obstacles such as collateral requirements, business feasibility, and financial literacy are often major barriers. The MSME financing strategy in Padang City, West Sumatra, focuses on expanding access to capital through People's Business Credit (KUR) and Islamic financing (BMT). The Cooperatives and SMEs Office actively facilitates partnerships, capital assistance, and training to increase business capacity to qualify for bank financing.

### Theme 4: Product Innovation Strategy

Product diversification efforts are an important strategy in business development to expand the choices offered to consumers (Sohl et al., 2020). One of the Padang City Cooperative and MSMEs Department explained: "The Padang City Cooperative and MSMEs Department provides training to MSMEs to diversify products that are in line with the businesses that have been run so far by MSMEs and diversify MSME packaging." Through diversification, businesses don't just focus on one type of product but also develop product variations tailored to changing needs, tastes, and market trends. This strategy allows businesses to reach a wider market segment while increasing their competitiveness amidst increasingly fierce competition. An MSME owner said: "The training provided by the government helps us innovate products according to consumer tastes." Furthermore, product diversification efforts must be aligned with product quality improvements, which are key factors in building consumer trust and loyalty. High-quality products will provide added value and a better customer experience.

In line with this, attractive packaging design has a strategic role in building a strong brand identity that is easily recognized by consumers. An MSME owner said: "The training provided by the government is not only related to product innovation but also packaging innovation." Packaging is no longer merely seen as a container or protector for a product, but also as a crucial element in a marketing strategy that can create a decisive first impression. Through appropriate design, packaging can represent a product's value, character, and quality, thereby forming a positive perception in

consumers' minds from the moment they first see it. Uniquely designed, informative, and aesthetically pleasing packaging serves as an effective visual communication medium for conveying a brand's message to the market (Ghorbani & Westermann, 2025). Thus, packaging not only contributes to functional aspects but also becomes a crucial instrument in building a competitive and sustainable business image amidst increasingly dynamic market competition.

#### Theme 5: Market Network Expansion Strategy

MSMEs feel they have limited access to the broader market. Several MSMEs acknowledged that they have limited market access. An MSME owner said: "We have limitations in accessing a wider market." However, the Cooperatives and MSMEs Office is making efforts to facilitate marketing through exhibitions, bazaars, and mini markets, an effective strategy for increasing the visibility of MSME products directly to consumers. These activities not only provide promotional space but also open up opportunities for direct interaction between producers and consumers, allowing business actors to obtain real-time feedback on quality, price, and market preferences. Furthermore, participation in these various marketing events allows MSMEs to expand their business networks, establish strategic partnerships, and increase public trust in the products they offer (Capó-Vicedo et al., 2026). Offline activity-based marketing approaches still play a vital role in building a strong market foundation.

Integration with digital marketplaces is a strategic step in expanding marketing reach in a more massive and sustainable manner. A representative from the Padang City Cooperative and MSME Service explained: "The Padang City Cooperative and MSME Service provides training on using marketplaces for marketing MSME products." Utilizing digital platforms allows MSMEs to access a wider market without geographical limitations, while increasing efficiency in transaction and distribution processes (Arjang et al., 2023). The synergy between offline marketing through exhibitions and bazaars and online marketing through digital marketplaces is expected to create an integrated, adaptive, and competitive marketing system in the face of developments in the digital economy.

#### Theme 6: Ecosystem Collaboration Strategy

Business community involvement is an effective collaborative strategy in strengthening the MSME empowerment ecosystem. An MSME owner said: "Synergy with the business community really helps MSME development." The business community acts as a forum for sharing knowledge, experience, and best practices among MSMEs, thereby creating a sustainable collective learning process. One of the Padang City Cooperative and MSMEs Department explained: "The Padang City Cooperative and MSMEs Department involves universities in developing MSMEs by making MSMEs a laboratory for transforming knowledge and applying the results of lecturers' research." The synergy between these business communities not only increases the capacity of individual business actors, but also strengthens social cohesion and local

economic resilience (DiBella et al., 2023; Ermawati & Utami, 2025; Purnomo & Purwandari, 2025).

The involvement of higher education institutions provides significant contributions in the form of scientific and innovation-based mentoring (Osano, 2021). Through community service activities, applied research, and business incubation programs, universities can transfer knowledge and technology relevant to the needs of MSMEs. Continuous mentoring enables businesses to improve managerial skills, adopt product innovations, and optimize data-driven marketing strategies (Harinurdin et al., 2025). Thus, collaboration between the business community and universities is expected to create a comprehensive, adaptive, and sustainable mentoring model to encourage more inclusive and highly competitive MSME growth.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis of Findings

Theme	Subtheme	Code	Information
Improving Human Resources Capacity	Competency training and development; increasing business literacy and knowledge	“business management,” “finance and bookkeeping,” “workshops and technical guidance,” “SME business literacy”	MSMEs are given training; the Cooperatives and MSMEs Service sees the need to develop the human resource capacity of MSME actors.
Developing MSME institutions	Legality; formalization of business	“business permit (NIB),” “business regulations and legality”	MSMEs are assisted in managing legal matters
Conducting product innovation	Innovation in product taste and quality; innovation in product design and packaging	“product variants” “consistency of product quality,” “market taste,” “product design,” “packaging”	Develop product variations; product quality; product packaging
Facilitating access to financing	Easy access to financing; source of financing	“loan administration,” “financing information,” “financial institution procedures,” “conventional banks,” “Islamic bank”	Expanding access to capital through People's Business Credit (KUR) and Islamic financing (BMT)
Expanding market network	Marketing strategy; utilization of digital platforms	“conventional market,” “digital market,” “social	MSMEs are given training in using

		media," "marketplace," "business website"	digital media as a promotional tool.
Ecosystem collaboration	Collaboration of MSME communities; collaboration of universities; collaboration of the private sector	"MSME actors," "business experience," "joint marketing," "mentoring," "academics," "partnership"	Involvement of business communities and universities in MSME empowerment ecosystem

## DISCUSSION

The research results show that low human resource (HR) capacity is one of the main obstacles to the development of MSMEs in Padang City. This condition is reflected in low productivity, weak management governance, limited technology adoption, and low product quality and motivation among entrepreneurs. These findings indicate that HR issues are not only technical but also structural, impacting the overall competitiveness of MSMEs (Hariyono & Narsa, 2024). In line with this, the Padang City Cooperatives and MSMEs Office has intervened through human resource capacity building training covering business management, financial management, and technology utilization. This training program serves not only as a knowledge transfer but also as a process of transforming business actors' mindsets from traditional approaches to more professional and data-driven business management. With ongoing training and mentoring, MSMEs are expected to be able to increase operational efficiency, improve decision-making quality, and enhance competitiveness amidst increasingly digital and competitive economic changes.

The majority of MSMEs in Padang City remain informal businesses with a low level of legality. This condition limits access to financing, partnerships, and government empowerment programs. The lack of business legality, such as a Business Identification Number (NIB), impacts business credibility in the eyes of financial institutions and business partners. However, the government is making efforts to facilitate legality management as part of strengthening MSME institutions. The strategy of institutional strengthening through business legalization demonstrates that business formality is a crucial foundation for building a healthy and competitive MSME ecosystem. With a NIB, MSMEs not only gain legal certainty but also broader access to financing, training, and markets. Business legalization can be viewed as an instrument of structural transformation that encourages MSMEs from the informal sector to a more productive and sustainable formal sector (Mehjabeen & Khan, 2024).

Product innovation is a crucial strategy for increasing the competitiveness of MSMEs. Product diversification enables businesses to meet diverse market needs while responding to changing consumer trends. Improving product quality is a key factor in building customer trust and loyalty. Beyond product aspects, packaging design also plays a strategic role in building brand identity. Packaging serves not only as a protective layer for

the product but also as a visual communication medium that represents the product's value and quality (Rambabu & Porika, 2020). With attractive, informative, and consistent packaging, MSMEs can increase product differentiation while strengthening their brand position in a competitive market. Therefore, product innovation must be understood as a combination of quality, variety, and an integrated branding strategy.

Access to financing remains a major challenge for MSMEs in Padang City, primarily due to unmet collateral requirements, leading to financial exclusion. This situation aligns with findings that MSMEs in developing countries often experience limited access to credit due to a lack of collateral and low business viability in the eyes of financial institutions (Luck & Santos, 2024). In response to these challenges, local governments are working to facilitate access to financing through the People's Business Credit (KUR) program, sharia-compliant financing, and assistance with business legality and digitalization. This strategy demonstrates that access to financing depends not only on the availability of funds but also on the institutional readiness and capacity of the MSMEs themselves.

Limited market access remains a significant challenge for MSMEs in Padang City. The Padang City Government, through the Cooperatives and MSMEs Office, has facilitated various promotional activities such as exhibitions, bazaars, and mini markets. These activities provide opportunities for MSMEs to introduce their products directly to consumers and obtain real-time market feedback. Furthermore, utilizing digital marketplaces is a crucial strategy for expanding marketing reach (Kumar et al., 2025). The integration of offline and online marketing enables MSMEs to build broader, more efficient, and data-driven distribution systems. The combination of these two approaches reflects the transformation of MSME marketing strategies toward a hybrid model that is more adaptive to developments in the digital economy.

Strengthening MSMEs cannot be achieved individually; it requires collaboration across actors within the business ecosystem. MSME communities serve as a space for sharing knowledge and experiences, fostering collective learning among business actors. This contributes to increased capacity and resilience at the local level. Furthermore, the involvement of universities makes a significant contribution through community service activities, applied research, and business incubation (Hassan, 2024). Synergy between the business community and academics creates a mentoring model based on science and innovation. Thus, ecosystem collaboration is a crucial strategy for creating more adaptive, innovative, and sustainable MSMEs in the face of ever-evolving economic dynamics (Leal et al., 2023).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study found that The Padang City Government has implemented a strategy to strengthen the competitiveness of MSMEs through an integrated and multidimensional approach, including training, mentoring, ongoing assistance, digital technology adoption, strengthening cross-sector coordination, and adaptive regional regulatory support. This approach has proven to be able to encourage the transformation of MSMEs towards more adaptive, efficient, and sustainable business models, while expanding access to markets and

productive resources. The implications of this research provide an important contribution to the formulation of more responsive and evidence-based policies in an effort to increase the competitiveness of MSMEs. Further strategies are needed to empower MSMEs in Padang City, which need to be focused on developing a roadmap based on superior clusters integrated with local potential, strengthening human resource capacity through needs-based training and results-based assistance, innovating inclusive financing access, accelerating digital transformation, strengthening cross-stakeholder collaboration, and supporting adaptive and pro-MSME policies to build a sustainable, innovative, and highly competitive business ecosystem.

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